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STANFIELD HALL.

BY J. F. SMITH,

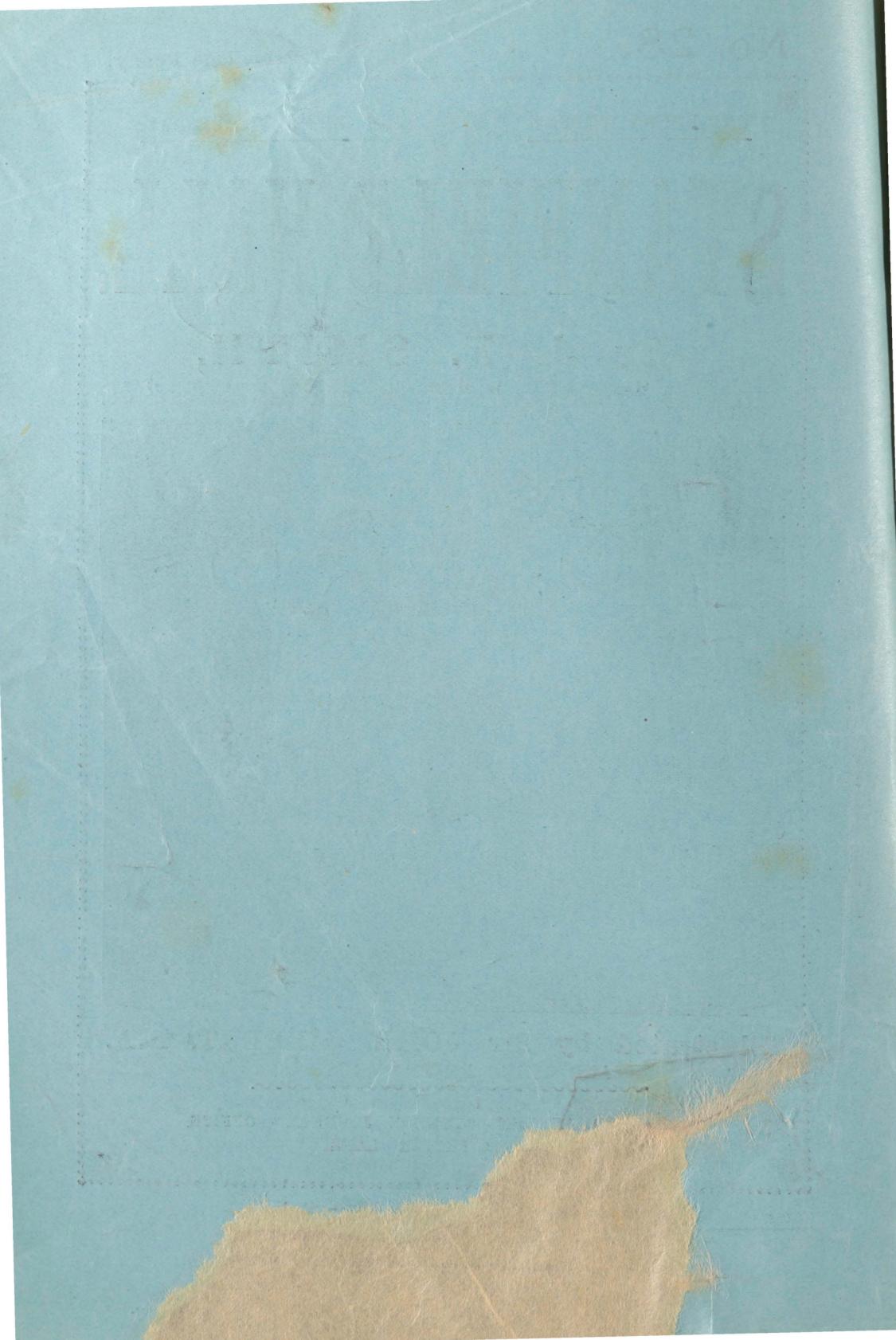
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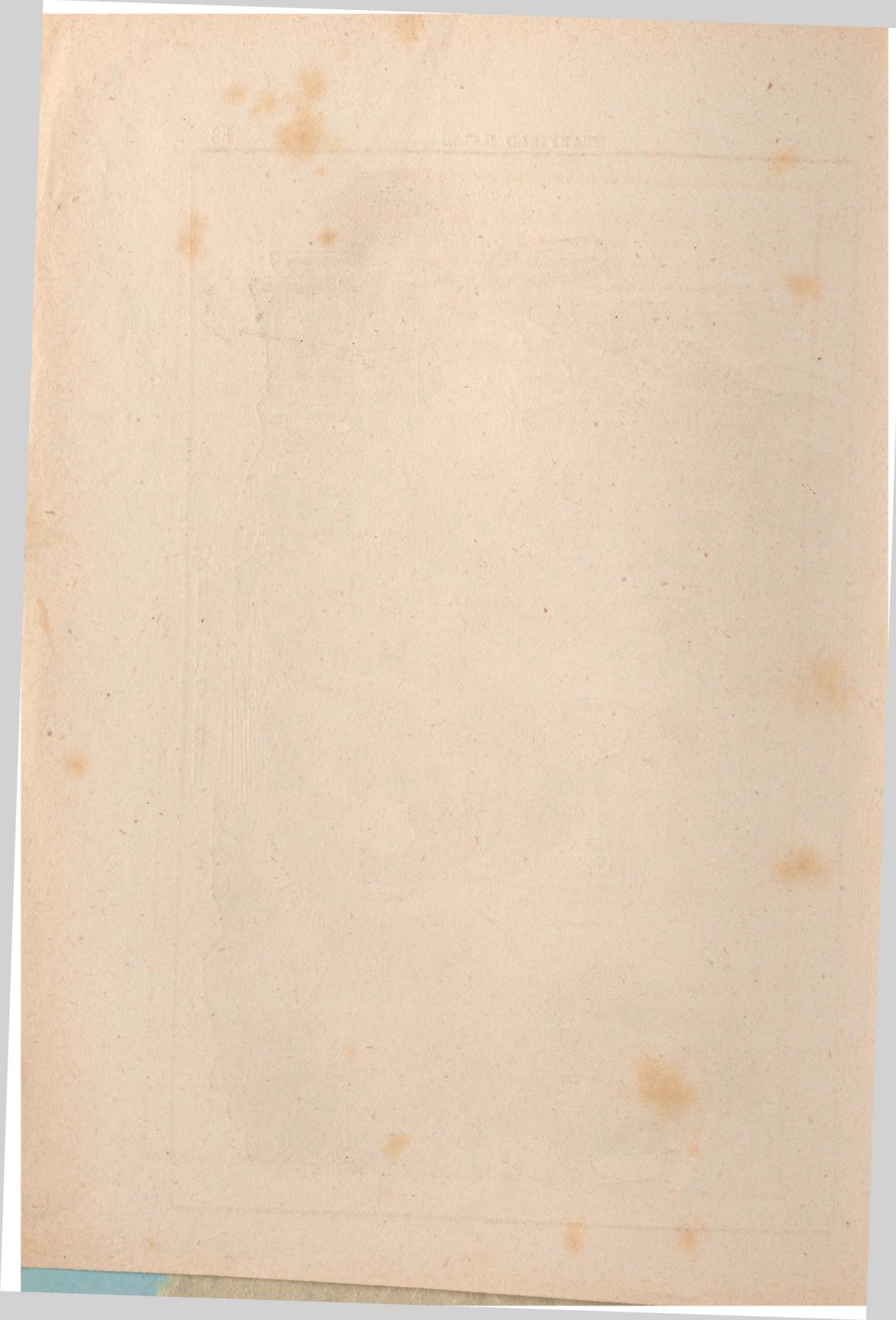
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[DISCOVERY OF THE SKELETON.]



firm. My heart shall draw fresh courage from thy pure devotion. Death may divide our hands, but not our loves ; but never shall the faith once pledged to thee be given to another."

The maiden raised the cross which hung from her rosary as she spoke, and pressed it to her lips ; and Walter—for the moment the happy Walter—bent the knee before the idol of his soul, and pressed with impassioned lips the hand dearer to him than the richest treasure earth possessed or Heaven itself could bestow. His dream of happiness—like most dreams of happiness in this world—was doomed to be brief ; for Adam—who, like Satan watching the first pair in Paradise, concealed behind the balustrades of the terrace, had observed their interview—advanced with his usual stealthy step from his lurking-place. He took no notice either of the secretary's position or the Lady Mary's confusion, but seemed to regard them both as the most natural circumstances in the world. The fabled basilisk, it is said, is never more dangerous than in repose. Such, at least, was the case with the cold, subtle agent of Sir John de Corbey's unnumbered villainies.

"Our lady," stammered the secretary, endeavouring to hide his confusion, "had conferred a favour on her servant, when you stepped in, and—"

"Broke the current of your gratitude," added the old man, with a sarcastic smile. "She is a liberal mistress."

"What mean you ?" demanded the young man, impatiently, for he liked not the look or manner.

"What should I mean ?" replied the intruder, in the same sneering tone. "The blush upon her cheek doth but betoken kindness to a menial, and in thy shifting eye I read thy heart's true character. Thou wouldest not deceive me," he added, ironically, "wouldest not lie to screen thy lady, e'en though she loved her servant."

Turning from the young man as if he deemed it waste of time to continue the discussion, he addressed himself to the heiress, informing her with an air of mocking respect that her guardian wished to speak with her.

"Fly !" whispered Mary to the secretary, as she passed him on her way to the hall. "Wolsey is now our only hope." The close attendance of Adam prevented any adieu beyond the look which accompanied the words ; but that was eloquent as love could make it.

"I must away," exclaimed Walter, as soon as he was alone upon the terrace. "Soon as Sir John hears of my daring passion my life will be beset. Those who have crossed his path had better live,ameleon-like, on air : though yon cursed leech has skill enough to poison the very atmosphere I breathe, so even that were dangerous."

As the speaker descended the steps which led from the raised walk to the open grounds, two of the knight's foreign retainers sprang upon him, and, despite his resistance, he was borne to a strong room at the top of the loftiest tower of the hold; the window of which, it is true, was unbarred, but at such a distance from the ground that nought could fall from it and live. A cloak had been thrown over his head to stifle his cries; for the young man was so beloved, that many of the household would have drawn their swords in his defence, despite the terror which the knight and his minister, Adam, universally inspired. Here the captive was left to meditate alone; a thousand times did he curse the imprudence which had betrayed his secret, and indulge in gloomy anticipations of the future.

The Lady Mary found her guardian seated in the library of Stanfield, a low-arched room, which received its distinctive appellation from a few books and manuscripts kept in an ancient oaken press, where many of the deeds and charters concerning the estates were likewise preserved. A village schoolmaster of the present age would have smiled at such a library; but in the reign of Henry VIII. it was thought sufficiently considerable to merit an especial notice in the chronicles of the Monk of Cotessey—a writer whom, in the course of our work, we have before referred to.

"You summoned me, Sir John," said the trembling girl; for years had not diminished the terror which in childhood he had inspired her with.

"I did," replied the knight, leading her to a seat; "for converse which concerns your happiness and mine. Why," he added, taking her hand, "are you thus obstinately blind to your own good? Rank, observance, and respect await my bride—a noble state my widow."

"Such," said his ward, "are to me superfluous; nobly born, I need not their advantage. Besides," she added, "ask your own heart, do they give happiness?"

"A philosopher!" exclaimed her tormentor, with a sneer.

"No, sir," replied Mary, spiritedly, "a Christian. I have no wish to wed; the difference of our years renders this suit impossible. Be generous, then, and urge the theme no more; be just to your own honour, lest men should say Sir John de Corbey broke his kinsman's trust, and gained by fraud the lands he failed to win by blood."

Hitherto the conduct of his ward had been so submissive and respectful, that the knight was both astonished at her firmness and stung by the knowledge of the fact her words conveyed. The scenes of terror and distress which in her infancy she had experienced had never been effaced from the memory of the thoughtful child, but had been pondered over from year to year, almost from day to day.

The relations of Steadman, too, and the wild, melancholy ravings of his mad sister, had impressed her mind with fearful doubts of her dark guardian's character.

The thrust had been a home one, and for a few minutes he regarded her with a glance of cold and stony hatred, which, while it made her young heart beat with terror, served but to confirm her resolution.

"And yet," he said, regarding her with an insulting look, "this cold, coy, and contented maid can love in secret, and, forgetful of her blood, receive the homage of a menial's heart. Mary of Stanfield, thou art disgraced!"

The blush which suffused the cheek of the fair girl at the brutal words was in itself sufficient refutation: Morning might have envied it for its purity—Innocence have offered it to Cruelty for its justification; it was a witness fresh from the heart—pure as the life-stream which coloured it. She felt that the moment had arrived when further concealment would not only be unwise, but useless; and trusting that her lover was already on his way to implore the powerful protection of the cardinal, she answered with the courage of insulted virtue:

"Tis false, sir knight! Nay, frown not at my boldness," she added; "the pride of innocence and womanhood compels me now to speak. Walter's love is pure and generous, and cannot disgrace me. He does not seek to raise his fortunes by wreck of my happiness; he would not force me to the arms of wrinkled age—extorting vows love only should bestow—"

"Insulted, rejected!" interrupted De Corbey, pale with passion, "and for a peasant!"

"Peasant!" repeated Lady Mary, scornfully. "He hath a prouder title, sir, than king ere gave or herald's pen inscribed—Nature's nobility, a generous heart; besides, I have often heard you yourself declare that Walter's birth was gentle."

"Let him prove it, then, before his judges."

"His judges!—of what crime can you accuse him?" demanded the astonished maiden.

"Of an attempt to steal an heiress from her guardian's trust," replied the villain. "Wisely our laws protect the high-born maid from the weak promptings of her yielding heart, guarding the honour of a noble line left in such frail keeping. In wooing thee Walter hath sinned against the law. He is my prisoner, and his doom—"

"Mercy!" exclaimed the agitated girl, all her assumed firmness giving way at the thought of her lover's danger, which, from the law cited by her guardian, she knew to be no imaginary one; "kinsman, mercy!"

Like some pleading angel, she sank upon her knees before her persecutor, who surveyed her with a dark smile of triumph, for he

fancied that he had found the means to bend her resolution and mould her to his purpose—the means of Walter's danger.

"Mary," he answered, calmly, "I will be just."

At this moment Henry de Corbey, eager to have an explanation with his father, entered the apartment. From one of his attendants he had just heard of the secretary's arrest, but he wisely kept that knowledge, and the resolution he had framed in consequence, to himself. When he beheld his cousin kneeling at the feet of his stern parent, his agitation for a moment deprived him of his firmness; recovering himself, he passed between her and the knight, and raising her, said in a tone of gravity beyond his boyish years :

"Rise, Mary, rise—nor shame my father's manhood by your knee."

"Retire, Henry," cried her persecutor, ashamed of being detected in an unworthy position by the son for whom he had so deeply sinned, and of whom he was so justly proud. "Leave me to guard the honour of our house."

"Your pardon sir," replied the youth, respectfully, "but we are both its guardians. Mary," he added, leading her to the door of the apartment, "leave me to reason with my father. Fear not for Walter," he whispered; "I possess the means to save him."

The kind look of sympathy and affection which accompanied the words of her cousin gave hope to the despairing victim's heart. She knew the truthfulness and devotion of the being in whom she trusted. "Be cautious," she replied, in the same low tone, as she left the room; "he is your father—urge not his wrath too far."

As soon as they were alone, father and son for a few moments regarded each other in silence. The high-minded youth had hitherto treated his parent with almost childish obedience and respect; and this sudden opposition to his will was as astounding, therefore, as it was unexpected.

"Art thou, indeed, my son?" demanded the knight, with a look beneath which Henry would once have quailed.

"Thy wretched son," replied the youth, mournfully; "for my happiness was built upon my father's love—my pride upon my father's honour—now dust and ashes both. Father, is this the way to fill thy kinsman's trust? Knaves betray the living—cowards the dead: retrace thy steps, lest men should call thee both."

The guilty man was struck, but not moved from his fixed purpose by the sorrowful appeal. The very admiration which he felt for the courage, generous impulse, and lofty bearing of the speaker, determined him more strongly than ever, no matter by what means, to atone the wrong he had done him by squandering his inheritance. The thought that the gifted being, the heir of his proud name, must struggle through the world with life's bare competence—a mere adventurer, with no fortune but honour and

his sword—was madness to him. He had sworn to rebuild the greatness of his house, even if he perilled his soul in the attempt. Unable to reason with the youth, he thought to overawe him.

“Boy,” he exclaimed, trying to assume a look of outraged dignity, “retire to your studies!”

“Such scenes,” replied Henry, firmly, “change boys to men, throw age upon the heart, turn youthful smiles to manhood’s lines of thought. What means this persecution? I will not shame thy ears to call it love. Would that I wronged thy honour to suspect it avarice.”

Finding that evasion or concealment with his son was no longer possible, the knight of Corbey motioned him to a seat beside him.

“Henry,” he began, “though of strong passions in my youth, once, like yourself, I had a generous heart; the time has been when death had not one terror like dishonour—when I believed the world all truth, and trusted its delusive smiles—when friendship was not, as now, a sound without a sense to my dull ear, or love a stranger to my heart. I trusted all—by all to be deceived. In Italy, that land which hell hath decked to look like paradise—where serpents lurk ‘neath flowers—whose very air, fanning the ashes of unhonoured age, revives the dormant passions they should hide—I entered as a soldier into life. I will not tire thy patience with my career. Enough, I mixed in the intrigues of courts, drained pleasure’s cup e’en to its bitter dregs, revelled in beauty till its sweetness palled me! What was my fate? The prince I bled for sold me to the foe; my triumphs hurt the ingrate’s vanity; the love I sinned for sought a richer dupe; fortune, which smiled upon my early youth, was quits with me in manhood. I was left a beggar.”

“And if left with honour, left with everything,” interrupted Henry.

“I will not die one,” sternly resumed the speaker. “I will, at least, redeem thy heritage. Justice, and nature, as her nearest kinsman, gave me the disposal of the Lady Mary. I offer her no unhonoured name, no undistinguished hand. Not a word,” he added, seeing that his son was about to speak—“thou mayest as well try to arrest the meteor in its course as turn me from my will. If the path be crooked, I alone shall trace it. How couldst thou bear a life of poverty? the jests of bloated wealth? the pity of thy equals? the sneers of thy inferiors? Never—never! The honours of our house shall not end in a beggar’s dish and wallet!”

Deeming that he had sufficiently impressed his son with the necessity of the sacrifice of his cousin at the shrine of interest, he left the apartment, his haughty soul stung to the quick at the explanation he had been compelled to offer, and unable longer to endure the alternate glances of astonishment and shame the unhappy youth cast on him.

"Heaven!" he exclaimed, "and is this man my father? the being I have held in honour—fancied the model of all chivalry! Surely some demon hath possessed his mind, poisoning his better nature. For me—for me he sins. What were the wealth of worlds bought with a tear from Mary's eyes—one stain upon the honour of my name? I swore to be her knight—boy as I am, I'll keep my oath. Perchance," he added, "she may love me in my grave. Yes, Mary, yes; I'll save thee from my father's selfish passion—my father from himself."

With this resolve the youth retired to his apartment, there to plan the means of putting into execution the noble purpose he had formed of freeing Walter from his prison, and watching over Mary's safety.

A stormy night had closed the eventful day we have endeavoured to describe. The wind whistled mournfully round the lofty tower in which the prisoner sat; his food untasted—Adam had brought it to him; and, although tormented with thirst, he feared to touch the draught within his reach. The old man's skill in poison was no secret to him. One after another, the various instruments employed by Sir John had disappeared or suddenly died, till at length the members of the household began to look upon their master's confidence as a dangerous favour, and shrank from it with terror. Still, so artfully the murders, if murders they were, had been committed, that no tangible evidence had been found to fix the crime. One fellow, who had been heard to mutter threats, died in the servants' hall on opening a letter which some stranger, it was said, had left for him at the gates. The leech pronounced it apoplexy. Another expired after being bled for a fall from his horse. The old members of the household shook their heads, but prudently remained silent.

"Thus ends my dream of life," murmured the prisoner to himself; "hope bids farewell at the door to those who enter here. Fool! I was amply warned, but, like the giddy moth, have lingered round the flame whose fire at last consumes me. I burn with thirst," he added, "but fear to drink."

Fearful lest the thirst which tormented him should overcome his resolution, with a blow of his foot he shivered the earthen vessel containing the water, which he justly feared to be poisoned.

"I'll not die like a drugged cat in this old tower!" he exclaimed; "they shall not make me accessory to my own murder. Oh!" he added, impatiently, "but for one hour of liberty! I'd use the gift so well, they should have swift steeds who caught me."

At this moment a tapping at the window was heard. At first the captive, deeming it the fluttering of an owl attracted by the light within his chamber, paid slight attention to the signal; but, on its being repeated, he hastened to the casement, and to his admiration as well as terror, found Henry de Corbey hanging by a rope which

he had fastened on the battlements above. The wind was so high, and the weight of the youth so light, that his form vibrated fearfully in the air at the dizzy height at which it was suspended, alternately appearing or disappearing, like some spectre floating on the winds, before the eyes of the prisoner. His features were pale, not from the danger of his position, but from the recent agitation he had undergone.

"Are you unfettered?" he demanded; and again a gust of wind blew him from the casement.

"I am," replied the prisoner, when the wind brought the youth within the sound of his voice again.

"Follow me, then," said the boy; "the cord is strong enough for both of us. Stay, I will slide down a few feet lower to leave you space—'tis well."

Suiting the action to the word, the adventurous boy permitted the rope to glide through his hands till he had descended some ten or fifteen feet lower, when, twining it over his arm, he paused in his descent, till he beheld the prisoner emerge from the casement of his chamber and follow his perilous example. It required both a firm eye and a strong hand; the cord vibrated fearfully against the side of the lofty tower, like the pendule of some giant clock. Fortunately, the young men both reached the ground in safety. Walter would have expressed his gratitude for his deliverance, but Henry stopped him.

"You owe me nothing—away! You will find my horse saddled and ready by the Druid's well. Waste not the moments precious to safety by words of thriftless gratitude."

"But Mary?" interrupted the secretary.

"Is safe whilst I have life. The angel which watches over innocence will not prove more faithful to his trust than I shall."

With a silent pressure of the hand the young men parted—though rivals, they esteemed each other—Walter to the Druid's well, where, according to his deliverer's direction, he found a gallant steed awaiting him; and Henry to the tower, to remove the rope by which he had effected the escape of the prisoner.

Great was the anger and confusion of Sir John de Corbey on the following morning when informed of his secretary's escape. Adam and two trusty domestics were immediately despatched in pursuit, while he himself, with the unhappy Lady Mary, now little less than a prisoner, removed from Stanfield to a mansion which he possessed in Norwich. There the household were entirely devoted to his purposes, and the heiress would be effectually removed from those who might protect her.

CHAPTER III.

Though human cunning hide each sinful deed
In its recess, dark as the womb of time,
Justice at last shall break each barrier through,
Holding the guilty and the proof to light.

WELL did the gallant steed on which the fugitive was mounted answer to the rider. In less than an hour the distance between Stanfield and Norwich was passed in safety ; and there did the breathless Walter first draw rein. Like a Will-o'-the-wisp he had dashed over bog and fen, forded the stream, skirted the wood, and galloped down the rough broken road, till he reached St. Giles's Gate—a massive, lofty tower, built with flint and stone, long since consigned by the cupidity and brutal ignorance of the corporation to destruction.

Few cities have more suffered from the Vandalism of its rulers than the capital of the Angles. How many monuments of the religious, civil, and domestic architecture of our fathers have they not destroyed ! The fine old keep of the castle erected by Roger Bigod in the reign of William the Conqueror remained almost uninjured till 1824 : 'tis true the elaborate Norman carving was much time-worn, grey, mouldering, and weather-stained, giving it that tone of antiquity which painters love ; but it was determined to restore Norwich Castle, or rather "smart" it, as the authorities profanely called it ; and the plan chosen was the very worst which could possibly have been adopted—that of entirely recasing it. In the new stone facing which the old keep now carries, the arcades and tracery have been copied, but the effect produced is just as if a noble antique statue had been restored by chipping away the entire surface, and replacing it by an imitation of vulgar workmanship. All that rendered it valuable is gone for ever, and it is atoned for by a copy, to make which it was necessary to destroy the original. Fit instrument for such a sacrilege, Wilkins, of National Gallery fame, was the architect selected, most probably because he was a native of Norwich. What other city could have produced him ?

It is not often that we indulge in digressions foreign to our tale ; such of our readers as have mourned over the destruction or degradation of the monuments of their birthplace will sympathise with and pardon us.

Much as Walter wished to consult his old friend Steadman in the emergency in which he found himself placed, he dared not venture to enter the city ; but, turning to his right, skirted the moat and walls till he arrived at St. Stephen's Gates—since destroyed by the same barbarians—and broke into the high road leading direct to London. Although the night was dark, Walter had not passed the post unobserved. The citizens kept careful

watch, for disputes were running high between them and the prior and monks of the cathedral respecting their jurisdictions ; to such a length had they been carried, that blood had been shed on both sides, and it was rumoured that Wolsey himself was about to visit the city in order to decide between them. It was therefore to the interest of the authorities to prevent their priestly opponents from sending any *ex parte* statement of their cause to the all-powerful minister. Several messengers had already been intercepted and detained ; they had subtle enemies to contend with, and they took their precautions accordingly.

The horseman had not proceeded more than eight miles in his present direction when he encountered a party which attracted his attention. Two soldiers of the city guard, mounted on serviceable steeds, were leading a sleek mule between them, on which a rider in the dress of a priest lay, bound by cords. His captors had thrown him, like a sack of corn, over the pillion, and despite his cries, groans, threats of excommunication, and prayers, were jogging along with him over the rough, uneven road at a pitiless rate. The unfortunate man was one of the prior's messengers, a brother of the convent, who, with more zeal than prudence, had undertaken to convey his superior's appeal and denunciations against the citizens to Wolsey. Like the secretary, he had been seen from the city gates, and his captors sent in pursuit of him. Despite the fleetness of his mule, they had succeeded.

"We have bagged the holy fox," shouted one of the men, laughingly, as Walter approached him, doubtless, in the obscurity of the night, mistaking him for a comrade sent to assist in the chase. "If the shaveling only prays as heartily as he curses, by our Lady, but he will win heaven by storm."

"Holy fox ! and shaveling !" ejaculated the captive, in a voice of terror and indignation ; "who ever heard Christian men speak in such ungodly terms ? Know you not," he added, "that you will both be damned for this ? For what says the Canon of the Church ? Accursed are they who touch——"

Here a terrible jolting on the road and scantiness of breath interrupted the priest's quotation.

"You ride fast, young sir," said the man who had first spoken, as Walter's nearer approach showed him the error into which he had fallen ; "'tis a late hour, and your journey seems suspicious. Stand to the city guard, and answer for your errand, name, and quality."

"I am beyond the city bounds," replied the young man, "and you have no right to question me. Stand back," he added, as he saw the fellow draw his horse into the centre of the road to dispute his passage ; "I am armed ; your blood be upon your own head if you assail me. Therefore beware."

"Strike !" roared the monk, who, on hearing the dispute, began

to entertain hopes of a rescue. "They are accursed, and thou mayst lawfully slay them. They have laid hands upon a priest; *de facto*, they are excommunicate; they have seized me and my mule upon the king's highway—*ergo*, they are robbers. I do deliver their souls to Satan, and their bodies to the sword. Smite them with good conscience."

A sharp blow which the second soldier—who still continued to hold the rein of the priest's mule—administered with the butt-end of his lance, admonished the churchman to be silent.

"Holy Mother!" he muttered to himself, "I shall be made a martyr of at last. It is not exactly the honour in the Church I should have preferred," he added; "but I suppose the saints know best what is fit for me!"

Walter, seeing that his assailant was about to level his heavy partisan, the mere weight of which, had it fallen upon his head, must have stunned him, drew his sword, and, putting spurs to his gallant, though jaded steed, pressed upon him. The encounter—if it deserved the name of such—was over in an instant; for, avoiding the ponderous weapon of his adversary by wheeling his horse round, he succeeded in inflicting so severe a wound upon his right arm, that it fell useless by his side.

"By Heaven, Gilbert," shouted the fellow, "but the springal hath wounded me; my arm is powerless. Upon him cautiously, for the knave fights well."

"Would he had slain thee outright!" thought the monk to himself; for he had been too severely admonished to give utterance to his thoughts aloud.

Now it was that the struggle commenced in earnest. The second soldier, warned by the fate of his comrade, stood not less carefully than manfully upon his guard; it was in vain that Walter wheeled round and round him, describing a circle of which his opponent remained the centre; the fellow, turn which way he would, confronted him—his ponderous partisan raised above his head, ready to crush him. So lightly armed was our hero, having nothing but his sword, that, unless he had seen a fair opening, it would have been madness to have closed with him—a single blow from that rude weapon being sufficient to slay both man and horse. Finding that their evolutions were in vain, as if by mutual accord, they drew up, and remained for several seconds regarding each other in silence.

"You use your partisan well, friend," said Walter; "pity that you do not employ it in a better cause than plundering lawful travellers upon their journey. Your name will prove a credit to the city-guard, which, sooth to say, boasts not too good a one already, if men speak truth of it."

"Plunder!" repeated the fellow; "he must have a doublet thinly lined who would stop thee, or yon prating monk, for gain."

By my patron saint ! I question if ye are not both richer in blows and curses than marvedes ! I'd not give a silver mark for the quiltings of both your jackets."

"Why do you bar my path, then ? Do you take me for a robber ?" demanded the young man.

"No," resumed the speaker, in a dogged tone, like one determined not to be thrown off his guard.

"For what, then ?"

"For a messenger of the wily prior, charged with more lies than virtues—more frauds than truth. If we must put our city's rights under the cowl of mother Church, at least it shall be the cardinal's—we will not yield to a crow of our own nest ; so either give up your letters, or return with me."

"What if I assure thee that I am a stranger to your city broils, and bear no letters ?" said the secretary, who began to feel impatient at the delay occasioned by the encounter.

"Thy assurance will exceed the measure of my credulity," replied the fellow, with a laugh.

"Thou art determined, then, to bar my passage ?"

"Indisputably."

"Why, then," exclaimed Walter, "St. George decide between us ! Have at thee for as obstinate a knave as ever gained a broken crown in a fool's cause ! Since we must play at loggetts, let the sides be equal!"

Clapping spurs to his highly trained but almost exhausted steed, the speaker turned suddenly round, and galloped to the spot where the monk still lay bound upon his mule. With a single stroke of his sword he cut the cords, and set the captive at liberty ; calling out to him at the same time, "If ever mother Church struck a sure blow, strike it now ; up, priest, and be doing."

The worthy brother needed no second invitation. No sooner did he feel his limbs at liberty than he slid from his mule, and, after giving himself a hearty shake, secured the long partisan which the wounded man had dropped in the previous encounter with Walter. With a prudence peculiar to his profession, before he advanced to the assistance of our hero, now furiously assailed by his opponent, whose rage at the liberation of the monk knew no bounds, he quietly dealt the fellow, who was stanching his wound, a blow on the head with the butt-end of his weapon—so scientifically applied, that it effectually prevented him, for some time at least, from either witnessing or taking any part in the affray. We beg our readers most particularly to remember that it was with the butt-end of the partisan the blow was given ; for brother Hugo, even in his wrath, remembered the Canon of the Church, which forbids a priest to smite with steel, lest it lead to the shedding of blood ; added to which, knocking him down answered his purpose quite as well. After this exploit, had the

liberated captive followed the dictates of prudence only, he would have remounted his mule, and continued his route; but anger, and a sense of something like gratitude, restrained him: he remembered the hard blows he had received, and, like an honest man, was anxious to acquit himself, of the debt. With a bold front he advanced to Walter's assistance, who, sooth to say, was hard pressed by his assailant, whose superiority of weapon gave him an advantage over him. In his early days the monk had evidently been used to arms; for he not only handled the partisan skilfully, but took up a position at the foot of a tree round which the combatants were repeatedly wheeling, which evinced considerable tact in strategy. With the long tough ash pole raised above his head—for he still remembered the Canon—he stood, as it were, the arbiter of the fight, ready to throw down his warder, and bid the contest cease. At last he did throw it down, and so effectually, that it fell on the young soldier's head-piece with a force which, had it not been well-tempered, must have shivered it to splinters; as it was, the wearer fell from his horse as suddenly as if he had been shot. The frightened animal, freed from its rider, galloped off, and was soon out of hearing.

"Fairly aimed and fairly struck, holy brother," exclaimed Walter, who, had he not been so unequally opposed in point of weapons in the encounter, would have blushed at such assistance.

"Pretty well," modestly replied the priest; "the spirit was willing, although the flesh was weak. But what are we to do with our prisoners?—heathens as they are, we cannot leave them thus."

The speaker, who, after all, possessed more of the milk of human kindness than its gall, took from the huge pocket of his gown a well-filled flask, and applied it to the lips of the senseless man, first bathing his brow with a portion of its contents. The fellow, who had been stunned more than seriously hurt by the blow, gradually recovered his senses, although at first they were naturally disposed to wander after the severe concussion which they had received.

"Holy Mother, how my brain dances!" he exclaimed. "What a flash of lightning was that which blinded me! Where am I? I dreamt I had been in Purgatory."

"A very natural dream, too, my son," replied the monk; "take care how you realise it."

"You here! and at liberty!" said the man; "why, where is Martin, then?" This was the name of his comrade.

"Much in the same state as yourself," meekly answered the priest; "the Lord hath smitten ye both; your companion sorely."

"I suspect," said the fellow, "the Lord has had very little to do with it. It was more like felling an ox than chastising a Christian."

After binding up the wounds of the two fellows, and cutting the saddle-girth of their remaining steed, so to delay their arrival

in the city that all further pursuit would prove in vain, Walter and the monk pursued their way.

Upon more familiar acquaintance, it seemed that they were both bound to the same destination, London, and each to implore the protection of Wolsey ; the churchman for the rights of his convent in their disputes with the citizens, the secretary for himself and the Lady Mary.

Making good speed, they arrived in the metropolis, and learnt that the minister was at his newly-erected manor-house of Hampton, the magnificence of which, it was whispered, excited the jealousy of his master, and induced the favourite, at last, to surrender it to him, receiving Richmond in exchange. Here the two travellers parted—the priest to lodge with those of his order in the city, the young man to the house of Sir John de Corbey on the banks of the Thames ; the only inhabitant of which was an old chaplain, who had protected him in his infancy, and finally introduced him to the family of his patron : the mansion for several years had been abandoned by its owner—too many fearful associations were connected with it to permit him to dwell in peace there.

Independent of the affection which he bore to his venerable friend, it was necessary that he should see him, in order to obtain the letter which his father had written to the cardinal, and which, for many years, had been left in the old man's care. Otherwise, perhaps, he had not ventured near the fatal spot, even though deserted by its designing master. So unused was Father Celestine to receive visitors, that Walter had to ring at the closely-barred gates several times before the worthy man could be roused from his studies.

He was a man learned beyond the spirit of his times ; a ripe good scholar, but unbefriended churchman. Although removed from all active intercourse with the world, even he had heard of the effect produced by Luther's preaching, and obtained from a brother in Germany, who was one of that fiery apostle's earliest disciples, copies of his writings, in perusing which he was so intently absorbed, that it was not till the fifth or sixth peal of the great bell that the idea struck him of some one desiring admittance at the gate.

Wondering who, at such an hour, for it was already nightfall, had arrived to break in upon his solitude, the recluse closed the volume, and, taking the lamp from the table, proceeded to the great entrance whence the ringing came. At the sound of his favourite's voice he quickly let fall the massive bars, and bade him a thousand welcomes. There was one green spot in the old man's heart—one oasis in his life's desert, and Walter was the being who inhabited it. He had watched over him in his infancy, and he loved him in his manhood ; the very anxieties he had occasioned him increased his affection. His feelings had found but one

trunk round which to twine themselves, and gratefully expended all their foliage on it.

“What unexpected fortune,” he demanded, “brings you at such an hour?”

“Are you alone?” replied the young man.

“Alone with solitude,” answered the priest, eying him uneasily at the question.

“Then bar the gates.”

“Bar the gates!”

“I am a fugitive—pursued, I doubt not; and my life in danger.”

Without a second word, Father Celestine did as he was requested. The thought that his *protégé* was in danger armed him with unusual presence of mind. As soon as the fastenings were secure, he quietly resumed the lamp, and led the way to his own cell, from which he had so lately been disturbed.

“In times like the present, Walter,” he began, “when virtues are too often punished as crimes—when vice lords it openly, and truth finds no security but in concealment or the grave, I will not ask thee what fault, but rather what merit, hath drawn this danger on thee, and driven thee a fugitive from Stanfield.”

Charmed with the old man’s simple confidence in his integrity, the secretary related the story of the Lady Mary’s persecution, his own ill-starred passion, his danger and escape, and the hopes he built upon the letter of his father to the cardinal. His friend heard him with patience, occasionally shaking his head at the history of his love; for, recluse as he was, he knew sufficient of the world to appreciate the distance between his orphan favourite and the wealthy object of his wishes. His first words, therefore, were to discourage him in a pursuit which he feared was hopeless; added to which, although he knew much of books, he had not the least idea of the tender passion.

“This comes of love and women,” he exclaimed, “the source of evil since the commencement of the world; the last lost Paradise—the first perilled the empire of the world. Perhaps, after all,” he continued, a ray of kindlier feeling crossing his heart as he saw the mortified looks of his listener, “there may be something delightful in having a being to confide in—to share our pleasures—to relieve our cares—in having children to resemble us. Yes, yes,” he added, after a pause, as if reasoning with himself, “tis just that man should love; the heart alone must not be barren. So thou art right, boy, to obey its instincts; would I could say wise in the object of thy choice!”

Ere Walter could reply a loud ringing at the bell startled them both from their seats.

“I am tracked!” whispered the fugitive; “the bloodhounds are upon me.”

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